1 – Introduction
2 – To Use or not to Use the Strict Chronology Version
3 – How Genesis Genealogies were Abridged
4 – Thread of History not Lost in the Post-Flood World
5 – Survival of the Genesis Chronology
6 – Writing and Technology: Did Mankind have to Start from Scratch?
7 – The Ice Age
8 – Conclusion

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5 – Survival of the Genesis Chronology

Following the appearance of Abraham's father Terah, the *Book of Genesis* starts to provide more detail about the lives of the post-Flood patriarchs. The early history of humankind was transitioning into a new phase. The Books of Genesis 1-11 had made it through the gauntlet of post-Flood events and was about to be dropped into the care of faithful Abraham and the Hebrew generations that followed.

About Terah's family, we learn that *"Terah lived 70 years and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran."* (Genesis 11:26) It almost sounds as if his wife bore triplets. But further ahead we learn that when Terah died in Haran at the age of 205 years, Abraham was only 75 (not 135) years old. This means that Terah was actually 130 (not 70) years old when Abraham was born. (Genesis 11:32, 12:4)

Here we run into a major feature of ancient Mid East culture: the birth of the first son was supremely important. Jacob referred to his first-born son Reuben as the *"beginning of my strength"*. (Genesis 49: 3) In the case of Terah, at 70 years he had his first-born son who was probably Haran. The other two sons, Abraham and Nahor, are listed there because they were part of Terah's line – his *"beginning of strength"* which began at the age of 70. But Abraham's actual birth date was somewhat later. In the ancient view, however, that was a minor detail – a mere extension of the *"beginning of strength"* event that took place when Terah was 70 years of age.

Perhaps this could be compared to how one might advertise a series of sermons, or playoffs in sports, or episodes in a movie or TV drama production. The advertisements will emphasize the date of the first sermon or playoff or episode, so that the audience can start at the beginning and not miss any part of the series.

In a similar way, the *"beginning of strength"*, the date of the firstborn son, was the important year to be listed for the birth of the various patriarchs in ancient times. However, the son who ends up carrying the torch so-to-speak, the one named to continue the line of succession, may not, like Abraham, be the firstborn son.

Whichever son turned out to be the "torch-bearer" – the Messianic link – had a lot to do with his influence or faithfulness or chosenness – as much as whether or not he was the firstborn son. And as we know from the example of the "birth" of Moses to his "parents" Amram and Jochebed, that "son" may actually be an influential descendant born in a later generation of that family line.

> **It is quite possible that only a small number of the patriarchs listed in Genesis 11 were firstborn sons. A comparison of 11:10 with 5:32 and 8:13 suggests that Shem was not. A comparison of 11:10 with 10:22 suggests that Arpachshad was not. And we have already seen that Abram was not. Actually, *not one* of the Messianic ancestors in Genesis, whose family background is known in any detail, such as Abel, Seth, Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and Perez, was a firstborn son. The year of begetting a first son, known in the Old Testament as "the beginning of strength," was an important year in the life of the Israelite (Gen. 49:3, Deut. 21:17, Psa. 78:51, and Psa. 105:36). It is this year, then, and not necessarily the year of the birth of the Messianic link, that is given in each case in Genesis 11. Thus we have clear evidence for the possible addition of a limited number of years from the lives of some of these patriarchs to the total of years from the Flood to Abraham. (*The Genesis Flood,* pg. 480. Published 1961)**

In addition, there was the difficulty of keeping records during those times when there was no clear line of succession in the midst of a large population. In the era of time immediately after the Flood, probably it was

easy to pass on the torch of ancient records from Noah to Shem and on to a few generations later. However, with time and greater numbers of people, the line of succession could have become unclear. Such was the case in the era recorded in the *Book of Judges*, or for the children of Israel during their prolonged sojourn in Egypt.

The *Book of Genesis* features the highlights, or turning points, of early human history. For those who recorded the different parts of the Book, this was the main concern; recording the passage of time was a secondary consideration.

For example, as the Israelites flourished peacefully in the land of Goshen, probably there were few outstanding individuals or events to record; and consequently, whatever time records they kept were rather skimpy; as a result that time span had to be summed up in Exodus 12:40-41 and Galatians 3:17.

We see then that God was careful to make sure to account for the timeline thread of recorded history during those eras when it was starting to become threadbare. And we know this was the case during the sojourn in Egypt and the time of the *Judges.* And because God made sure to preserve it, today we are gifted with the amazing result – a historical heritage featuring a line of ancestors, stretching all the way back to the very dawn of human history.

And even though a few inconsistencies can be found – such as more than one generation merged under a family-founder, or the practice of dating from *"the beginning of strength"* – those breaches are not all that serious. And it does not diminish the astounding reality of these records' existence and the fact that they extend in an unbroken line all the way back to the very Beginning.

Major events of ancient history were recorded, such as the landing of the ark and the dawn of the new historical Age. The Tower of Babel was a major recorded event by which God re-affirmed for the human race what His plan for them was.

Another major recorded event (or perhaps the same Tower of Babel event) came in the days of Peleg. Once more, a dynamic event took place

when *"in his days the earth was divided."* (What does it mean *"the earth was divided"*? See Appendix 3 below.)

There were, no doubt, many exciting but unrecorded tales of the exploits of those early adventurers who migrated into different corners of the earth according to God's plan. We may well hear those stories in a future Age, but for now they will have to be postponed – along with any exact accurate record of the passage of time and generations between the Flood and the organization of the children of Israel into a government. Not until there was a line of succession of kings and rulers could the task of recording the passage of time carry on without the risk of missing any generations.

The important thing to remember is that the overall time span cannot be stretched unreasonably or beyond certain limits. The genealogies in Genesis 5 and 10 may be extended slightly, but they cease to be genealogies if large gaps exist.

> **To be sure, it was by means of Biblical analogies that we were able to find possible gaps in the genealogy of Genesis 11. But the point we now wish to emphasize is that *those very analogies serve also to limit our time-scale for Genesis 11*. The gap between Amram and Moses was 300 years, not 30,000. And the gap between Joram and Uzziah in Matthew 1:8 was 50 years, not 5,000. On the basis of the analogy of Biblical chronology, therefore, we maintain that it is very hazardous to assume a period of 100,000 years between the Flood and Abraham. (*The Genesis Flood*, pgs. 485-486. Published 1961)**

Does the fact that the Biblical genealogy has a few omissions make it invalid? As mentioned before, the genealogy testifies to the power of the Almighty who somehow managed to get around and past human frailties and string together the timeline of human history right from its very Beginning.

Remarkably, the timeline and records of the Flood cataclysm and pre-Flood world made it through the "gauntlet" of the post-Flood era. Before the rise of the Israeli nation, there was some risk of those records getting lost. As we've seen, the timeline cannot claim to be without a few missing

years and even generations. But remarkably, the recording of that ancestral line and those very ancient events never got lost. And even in those times when it was becoming feeble, the timeline always got re-established or accounted for in some way.

Does the fact that there are gaps in the genealogies mean that the Bible's version of history can be made to conform to modern evolutionary theories and its vast ages of time? This is a crucial question. For it would be easy to slip into thinking that a few gaps in the Genesis chronology provides a green light, either to forget the whole thing, or else stretch out the timeline and bring it in line with evolutionary speculations.

Evolution theory proposes that the human species appeared in some kind of primitive state about 100,000 to 250,000 years ago. Without getting into the biological, genetic, and other scientific reasons* that would invalidate such a belief, let us examine this question from a cultural-sociological point of view. (*For the various scientific reasons why monkey-to-man evolution over a long period of time is incorrect, posts 4D and 4E from the *Retrieving Mankind's Lost Heritage* series are recommended.)

Although we cannot know the exact dates for Creation and the Flood and could add a few extra centuries to the age of the Earth, there are limitations as to how far that age can be extended.

> **It would seem to us that even the allowance of 5,000 years between the Flood and Abraham stretches Genesis 11 almost to the breaking point. The time has come when those who take the testimony of God's infallible Word with seriousness should begin to look with favor upon the efforts of those who are examining and exposing the unwarranted assumptions and false presuppositions of uniformitarianism as it applies to the dating of early man. (*The Genesis Flood,* pg. 489. Published 1961)**

The above passage was written at a time when theologians and preachers were promoting the idea that the Genesis record could be stretched to accommodate the theories of gradual evolution that had gained preeminence in the world of science. Nowadays, among believers, there is, thankfully, less acceptance of that kind of interpretation.

But how do we know there are limitations as to how far the age of the Earth can be extended? One way is by using evidence from other sources. Numerous geological and astronomical studies and investigation point to a young age for the earth. That includes radioactive dating, which, according to new devices and research, is measuring young ages for Earth's history – instead of the vast ages of time that older and less refined methods used to do. (The posts for this information were already mentioned, and in this study we won't get into those scientific aspects.)

But from a cultural-historical angle also, there are several indicators pointing to a recent date for Creation and the Flood. It is generally agreed among secular and Christian historians that recorded history began about 5,000 years ago (or about 3000 B.C.) with the inhabitants of Sumeria. Prior to this, the various families and tribes of humankind were growing in numbers and migrating away from where Noah's ark had landed in the mountains of Ararat.

Many of these ancient tribes have preserved some version or other of the Flood and Creation account. There are at least 270 such legends to be found in ancient societies all over the world. In these ancestral legends it is obvious that the tribes of humankind, in their earliest days, had heard the Flood story, no doubt from Noah and his sons. The *Genesis* account is the official record, in what appears to be Noah's actual log of events. This we can tell in phrases like the following, which give detailed information about the dates of certain key events of the Flood legend:

> ***In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month…***
> ***In the tenth month, on the first day of the month…***
> ***In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month…***
> ***In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month…***
> **(Genesis 7:11; 8:5,13,14)**

It would appear that the account of this great event in Earth's natural history was recorded by Noah in his journal and passed down in written form through the centuries to be gathered finally by Moses in the *Book of Genesis*. Had Noah not written it down, the details mentioned in the above quotes would never have been remembered. And indeed, in all the oral

versions that were transmitted in other ancient societies, there is no mention of those particular details.

Remarkably though, several ancient societies were able to preserve an account of the Flood through their oral traditions for some time before eventually writing them down – quite an achievement. Their versions, as expected, show distortions because of not having the original written records. But it is surprising that all of them show traces of some of the same details – perhaps the raven and the dove, or the number of people on the ark, even just the fact that there was a floating vessel of some kind and a flood that overwhelmed the Earth.

Had the Flood happened a very long time ago, in line with evolutionary speculations, would not these legends get lost in our cultural memory? And what about the mysterious fact that cultures from around the world relate their versions of the same Flood event? That is good evidence for the Flood as an actual historical event. That evidence also points to Noah and his family as the only human beings left to re-start the human race and to begin re-populating the Earth… and to re-start the chronology of the human race.

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APPENDIX 3: "The earth was divided"

Genesis 10:25 states, *"The earth was divided."* This mysterious passage is often taken as a reference to the confusion of tongues and scattering of tribes from the city of Babel. This could be. But then, if Nimrod was the founder of Babel and the grandson of Ham, that would mean that the Tower of Babel event happened early in the post-Flood era; whereas Peleg came along rather late in that era. So it is possible that the division of the earth, whatever it was, refers to something else.

Another theory proposes that the division of the earth refers to the spreading apart of the continents (continental drift theory). A third theory could be that at the end of the Ice Age, sea levels rose drastically, drowning many coastal cities and separating land masses that were once connected via land bridges.

That passage in Genesis 10:25 presents us with a most intriguing mystery, the answer to which has not really been solved with any degree of certainty.

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Continue to Chapter 6 – Writing and Technology: Did Mankind have to Start from Scratch?